D-Day Rehearsal on Hayling Beach for the British landing on Gold Beach in Normandy on 6 June 1944
Exercise Fabius 2, 4 May 1944
and
The Construction of Phoenix Breakwaters

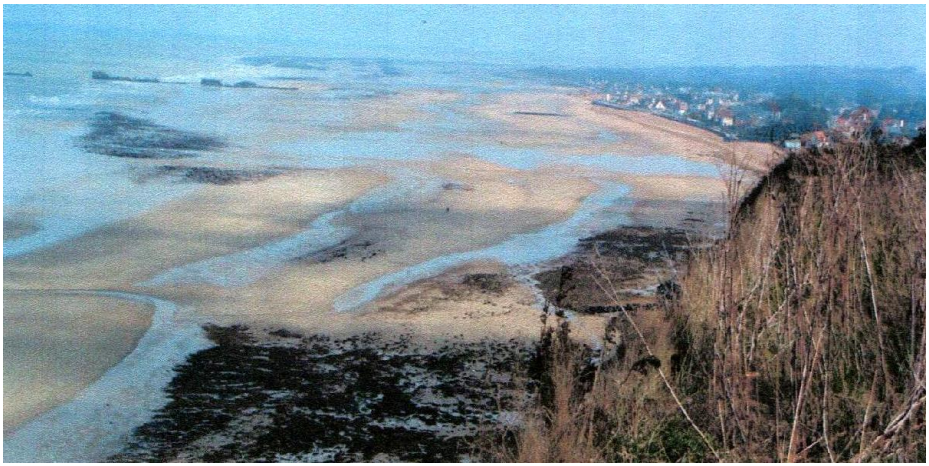

Figure 29. Gold Beach. Phoenix breakwaters, in middle distance, at eastern end of Mulberry Harbour. September 2009.

Compiled by A D Higham, with the valuable assistance of Ken Smith. Hayling's BEST MTI Group.

£6

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THE HAYLING ISLAND BOOKSHOP

With contributions on some of the activities on
war-time Hayling Island

by

Vic Pierce Jones
Sheila Troke
John Freeston

and
Miles Away on Hayling
The wartime memoirs of Ron Miles

Borough of Havant History Booklet No. 103

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D-Day Rehearsals

Introduction

In the spring of 1944, after three years of planning, the Allies were ready to embark upon Operation Overlord, the decisive and final major event of World War Two in Europe. The associated naval operation to move and land all the men and equipment was code-named Neptune. Overlord and Neptune together constituted the programme to ensure the final removal of the Nazi regime in Europe. This initial event became known as D-Day. To be successful and to provide sufficient resource to resist any German counter-offensive, on D-Day Neptune needed to deploy nearly 7,000 ships to land 150,000 men and their equipment on several beaches in northern Normandy.

Hayling Island was the location of a significant part of the preparations for D-Day. Units sited here were involved in the development of techniques, skills and equipment to help ensure this success.

The major contributions made by the military and civil members of the community were in four areas:

- Development of landing craft and their methods of use, largely based at the pre-war holiday camps,
- Use of Hayling for the construction of some Mulberry Harbour breakwaters, the Phoenixes,
- Development of clandestine activities prior to and during many assault operations, these being carried out by the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (COPPs) based at Hayling Island Sailing Club and
- Use of Hayling as a D-Day rehearsal landing beach, Exercise Fabius 2.

Exercise Fabious 2

To ensure that Overlord and Neptune would have the greatest chance of success, as much as possible had to be evaluated and tested beforehand. Exercise Fabius had therefore been planned to test the assault process and was carried about one month before D-Day. There were 6 Fabius exercises in all. These took place almost simultaneously. This was to ensure that the overall Navy, Army and Air Force operations could be carried out effectively in all their aspects and that any problems, particularly in the Command process, could be improved in time for D-Day itself.

Four exercises involved actual assaults so, in early May, simultaneous landings took place. They were; Fabius 1 at Slapton Sands in Devon, (the only exercise using live ammunition) sailing out of the Portland and Poole area ports, Fabius 2 at Hayling Island, Fabius 3 at Wittering/Beacklesham both sailing from all available ports in the Solent area and Fabius 4 at Littlehampton sailing mainly from Shoreham and Newhaven but with some forces from the Solent. Fabius 5 & 6 were carried out to test command and other organisational procedures.

In April, Exercise Tiger had taken place to train US forces in the landing processes themselves, also at Slapton Sands. In this exercise hundreds of American troops were killed in a chance encounter with German E-Boats.

Due to the large number of ships, men and aircraft involved, there was a considerable risk that the Germans might detect the activity and deduce that an invasion was imminent. For this reason the whole of the Channel area was sealed off by extensive naval and air patrols to ensure that no German observation should be possible. (Figure 1). In the event that observation did occur, a number of cover stories and press releases were prepared and were to be issued according to the extent that observation/engagement had occurred. (Figures 2, 3a and 3b).

Preparation

The Hayling exercise described here, was to prepare for the landing of Force G on Gold Beach at Arromanches and to the east, north of Bayeux in Normandy. (Figure 4).

As part of the D-Day preparations revised charts had been prepared of all British and French channel ports and a recently acquired example is from the English Channel Handbook, readily available from a number of sources, (Figure 5). Note 'Chateau Blanc,' the then name for part of Westfield House, now demolished.

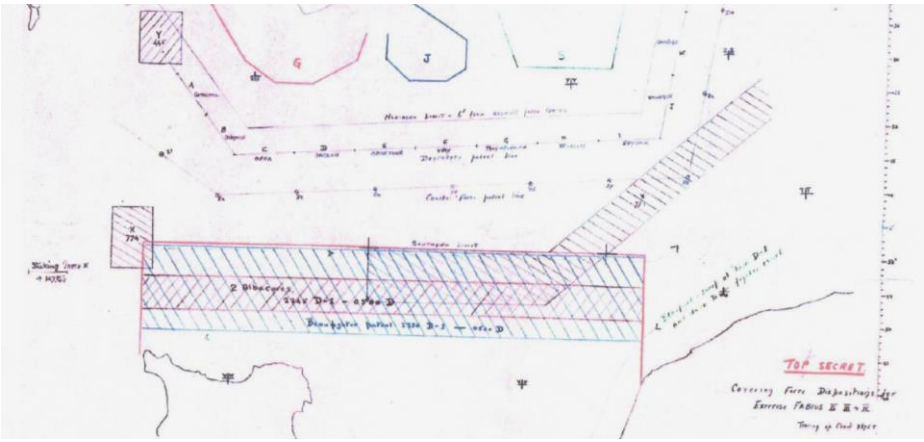


Figure 1. Protective shield around Fabius Exercise. *(NA)*

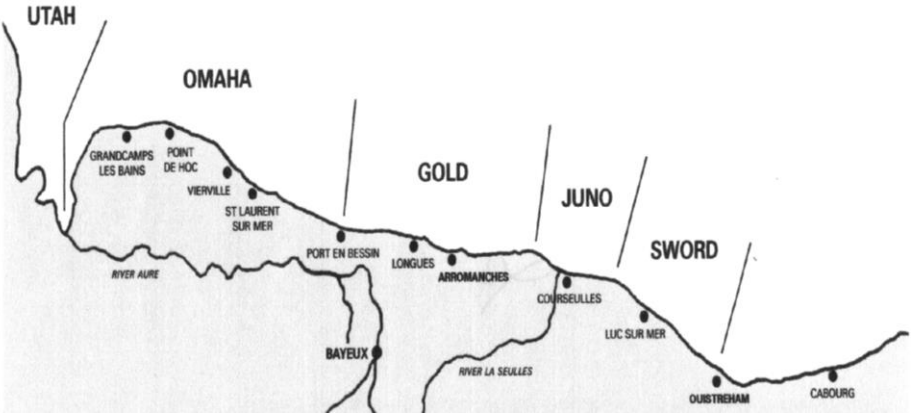


Figure 4. Map of D-Day landing beaches.

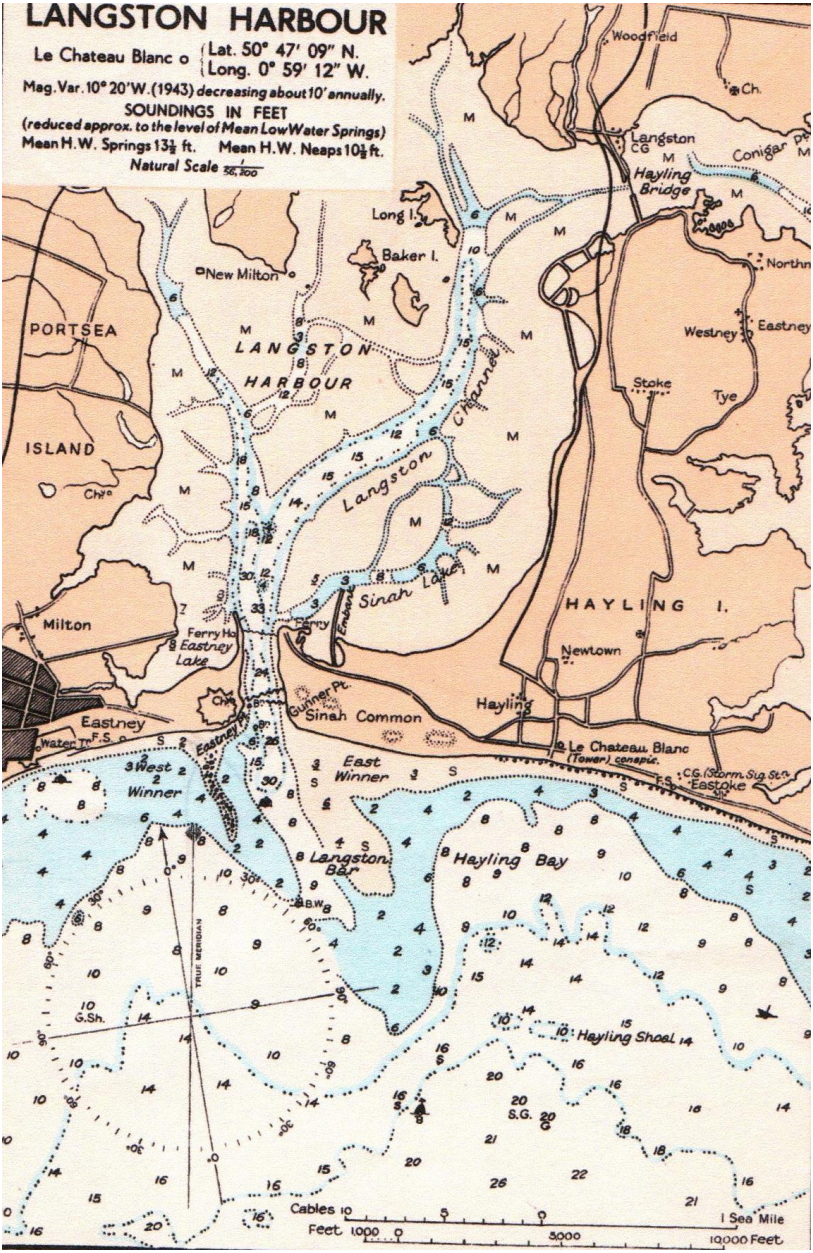


Figure 5. Example of chart resurveyed before D-Day to ensure all channel port navigation were up to date. (From *English Channel Notebook*. Local loan).

Draft – Top Secret
SHAEF/18231/One

Dear

1. I do not know whether the suggestion I am going to make is practicable or whether It will he repugnant to you personally.
2. The large scale exercise which I find necessary to carry out about 3rd - 5th May, will seriously detract from the degree of surprise that Plan 'FORTITUDE' is designed to achieve, if the enemy should interpret it In the true sense, as our final rehearsal.
3. Everything in our power must be done to convince the enemy that this exercise is the first, and that Operation 'OVERLORD' is the second of a series of exercises which must be carried out before D-Day.
4. I, therefore, submit for your considered opinion the proposal that you should address the Nation early in April in the following terms. "It will be necessary to hold a series of exercises during the next few months which, being unprecedented in scale, will call for many restrictions on the public. These must be borne with patience and it is the duty of every citizen to refrain from speculation. I consider that such an address would greatly assist me In my tssk of concealing from the enemy the date of "OVERLORD"
5. A similar warning should also be given to the DUTCH, BELGIAN and FRENCH peoples through the medium of the BBC, primarily with the object of preventing untimely uprising in their countries.
6. I realise that such action raises points of principle about which you may have personal feelings. Nevertheless, in view of the vital importance of achieving the highest possible degree of surprise on this occasion, I ask you to give the matter your earnest consideration.

To Right Honourable Winston Churchill, 10, Downing Street, LONDON S.W.1

See attached note

Figure 2. Discussion of risk of Fabius Exercise being detected. *(NA)*

STAFF MESSAGE CONTROL
TOP SECRET

TO FOR ACTION : AGWAR FOR COMBINED CHIEFS OF STAFF
PASS TO UNITED STATES JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
REPEATED : BRITISH CHIEFS OF STAFF, AFHQ
FROM : SHAEF, SIGNED EISENHOWER
REF NO : S 50895 CITE; SHSGS

THIS IS SOAF BUMBER 16

1. Exercises which may cause German reactions are being conducted from time to time. D-day of a major one named in succeeding message is 3 May.
2. It is desired that the nature of our propaganda be determined by the German reaction to the operation in accordance with the following plan.

STATEMENT

3. In the event of a German propaganda reaction the following SHAEF statement will be released simultaneously to the press and wireless:
"Land, sea and air exercises are being conducted by Allied Forces on a considerable scale in the Channel".
4. In the event of enemy attempts to engage our forces a special statement will be prepared and issued in the same way.
5. In propaganda to EUROPE this SHAEF statement should be given in the appropriate languages by a special voice which should be reserved for announcing all future statements from the Supreme Commander.
6. Except under specific instructions, the statement should be carried as part of the routine news bulletin. Programs should not be interrupted to announce the statement.

COMMENT

7. In the appropriate languages broadcasts, brief commentaries and explanations of this SHAEF statement should be given along the following lines:

Figure 3a. Proposed responses if Fabius is detected. (NA)

(A) In the case of mere propaganda reaction by the Germans.

(1) This is an exercise. The word invasion should not be used in this connection.
(2) The purpose of the operation is to perfect cooperation between land, sea and air forces and to test equipment.
(3) It should again be repeated that we shall give the word to the people of occupied countries when the time has come to act. This should be tied up with the Prime Minister's statement on feints and exercises. But no further speculation can be permitted suggesting that this exercise is a feint
(4) The story should not be artificially kept alive but allowed to run its natural news course.

(B) In the event that enemy forces do engage our forces.

(1) Comment should be restrained and factual and should not attempt to capitalize the action as a major defeat of the Germans.
(2) The line should be: "We carried through the exercise according to schedule despite German attempt of interference".
(3) The story should not be artificially kept alive but allowed to run its natural news course.
(4) On no account should the word invasion be used in comment on this operation.

GUIDANCE TO THE PRESS

(8) Guidance to the press will be along the same lines as the guidance above for propaganda.
(9) If practicable PWE and OWI (LONDON) will be given one hour advance notice before PRO release.

COORDINATION

(10) The above guidance has been issued to OWI (LONDON) and PWE. It is requested that UNITED STATES agencies be instructed to conform therewith.
(11) Unless covered by special instructions, the guidance contained in para 7 will apply for the treatment of all exercises of this nature.

SMC OUT 682

Figure 3b. Continuation of Fig. 3a. *(NA)*

Exercise Fabius 2, Preparation.

The Hayling exercise and the subsequent D-Day operations were to be directed from HMS *Bulolo*. This modern ship, requisitioned from the Australian Merchant Marine, also had been the British command ship for the earlier successful assaults at Algiers, Sicily and Anzio. (Figure 6).

Two weeks after Fabius and before D-Day, on 24 May 1944, King George VI boarded *Bulolo* to review the invasion fleet. The King is shown inspecting the crew and WRNS deployed on this ship (Figure 8). (I wonder how many of these are still able to tell of their exploits on D-Day?) He is then shown saluting the 'Sail Past' of landing craft (Figure 9).

The King also reviewed troops at Rowlands Castle on 22 May 1944 and a commemorative stone is on the Horndean Road at the entrance to a modern housing estate.

In preparation for Fabius and Overlord, vast numbers of men and their equipment had been assembled (and hidden) in the hinterland of Hampshire and Sussex. These men were in encampments and had to be taken to the embarkation ports ready for both operations. There are many photographs available of these preparations but Hayling was not heavily involved as it had much more critical tasks to perform (and the bridge was not suitable for heavy vehicles!)

On the 3 May thousands of ships and landing craft, having been loaded, left their various ports in the Solent area, assembled at sea and those for Hayling sailed anti-clockwise around the Isle of Wight to simulate the length of the subsequent cross-channel voyage to France.

The Bracklesham Bay forces sailed directly down the Solent and formed up south off Selsey. The LittIehampton forces, from Shoreham and Newhaven, formed up off Shoreham having been joined by some units from Portsmouth. (Figure 10).

During the exercise Coastal Command unfortunately bombed one of our protection patrol boats and the attached message was sent and reply received. (Figures 11 and 12).

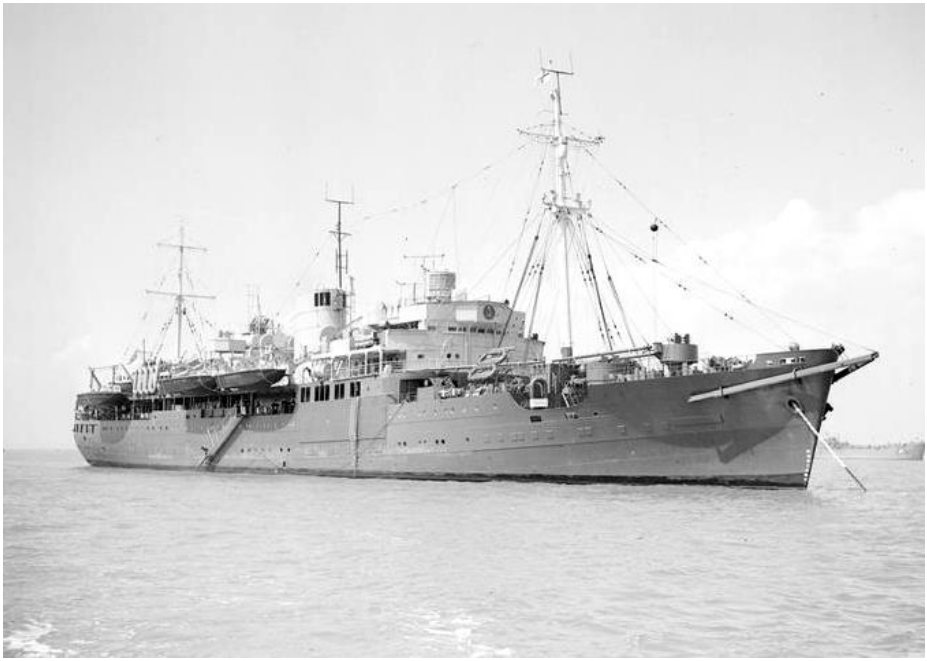


Figure 6. HMS *Bulolo.*

MV *Bulolo* was built in the Barclay Curle & Co shipyard Glasgow, and launched 31 May 1938. A twin-screw motor vessel she was 413ft long, had a 58ft beam and was of 6,267 gross tons. The ship was needed to enable Burns Philp to continue to honour the contract between the Commonwealth Government and the company for the mail steamer service between Australia, Papua, New Guinea, Solomon Islands, New Hebrides, Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands.

On 4 April 1942 her conversion to a Landing Ship Headquarters (LSH) commenced. A most extensive sophisticated communications system was built into the ship for Army Navy and Air Force control purposes. By October with some armament changes and refit completed, she had taken her place in the North Africa (Operation 'Torch') landing forces. She entered Algiers Harbour 9 November, the day after its surrender.

Commodore Douglas-Pennant, Naval Commander of Force 'G', hoisted his

flag on the HMS *Bulolo* 28 April 1944, after which exercises were carried out in preparation for D-Day. On 24 May 1944 King George VI visited the ship and reviewed the assault craft of Force 'G' from her bridge.

HMS *Bulolo* Service Record

Atlantic, November 1939 to April 1940	Convoy and Patrol Duties.
Algiers, November 1942	Under the Command of Admiral Burroughs.
Casablanca, January 1943	Communication Ship for Churchill Roosevelt Conference.
Sicily, July 1943	Under the Command of Admiral Troubridge.
Anzio, January 1944	Under the Command of Admiral Troubridge.
Normandy, June 1944	Under the Command of Admiral Douglas-Pennant.
Malaya, September 1945	Under the Command of Admiral Martin.
Singapore, September 1945	Used as the ship for the Japanese surrender.

Figure 7. Commodore Douglas-Pennant, shown here with his crew.

Figure 8. King George VI inspecting the crew of HMS *Bulolo. (IWM)*

Figure 9. King George VI inspecting invasion 'sail Past'. *(IWM)*

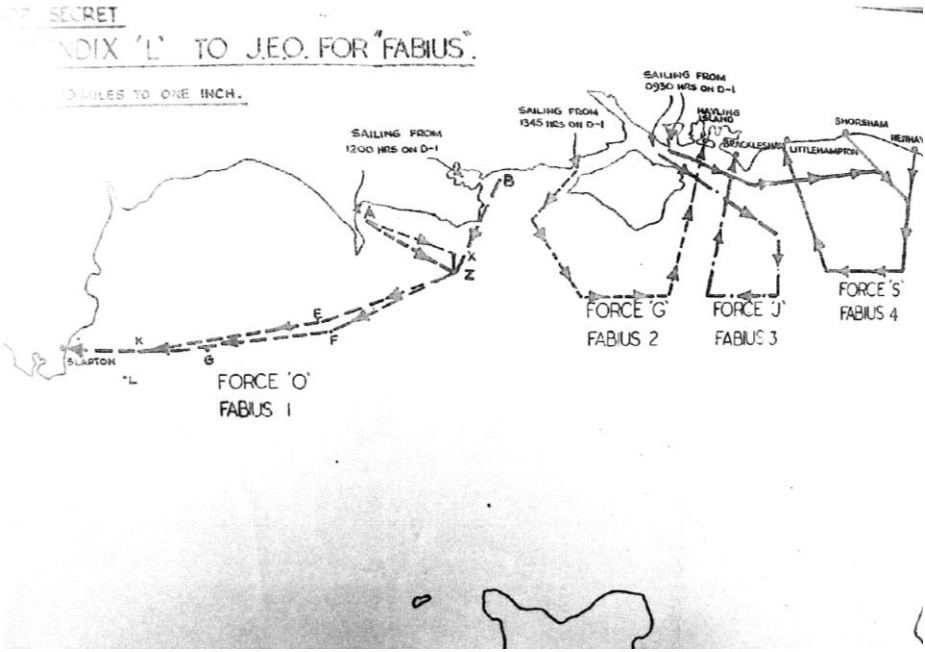
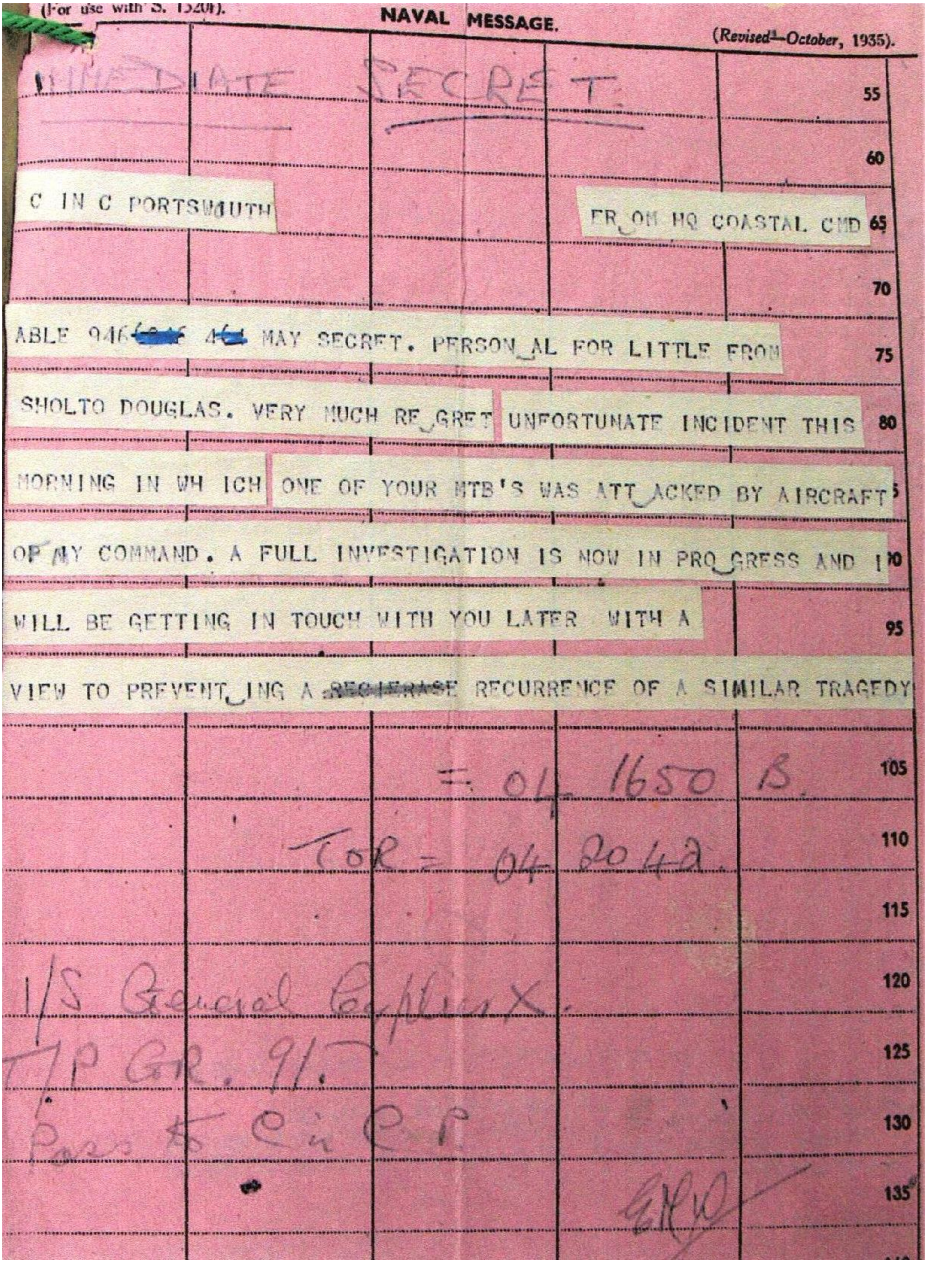


Figure 10. Routes of Fabius Exercise fleets.


(For use with S. 1520).

NAVAL MESSAGE.

(Revised 1st October, 1935).

IMMEDIATE SECRET.

55

60

C IN C PORTSMOUTH FR OM HQ COASTAL CMD 65

70

ABLE 946 4 MAY SECRET. PERSONAL FOR LITTLE FROM 75

SHOLTO DOUGLAS. VERY MUCH REGRET UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT THIS 80

MORNING IN WH ICH ONE OF YOUR MTB'S WAS ATTACKED BY AIRCRAFT

OF MY COMMAND. A FULL INVESTIGATION IS NOW IN PROGRESS AND I

WILL BE GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOU LATER WITH A 95

VIEW TO PREVENTING A ~~RECURRENCE~~ RECURRENCE OF A SIMILAR TRAGEDY

105

= 01 1650 B.

110

TOR = 04 2042.

115

120

C/S General Capt Wx.

T/P GR. 91.

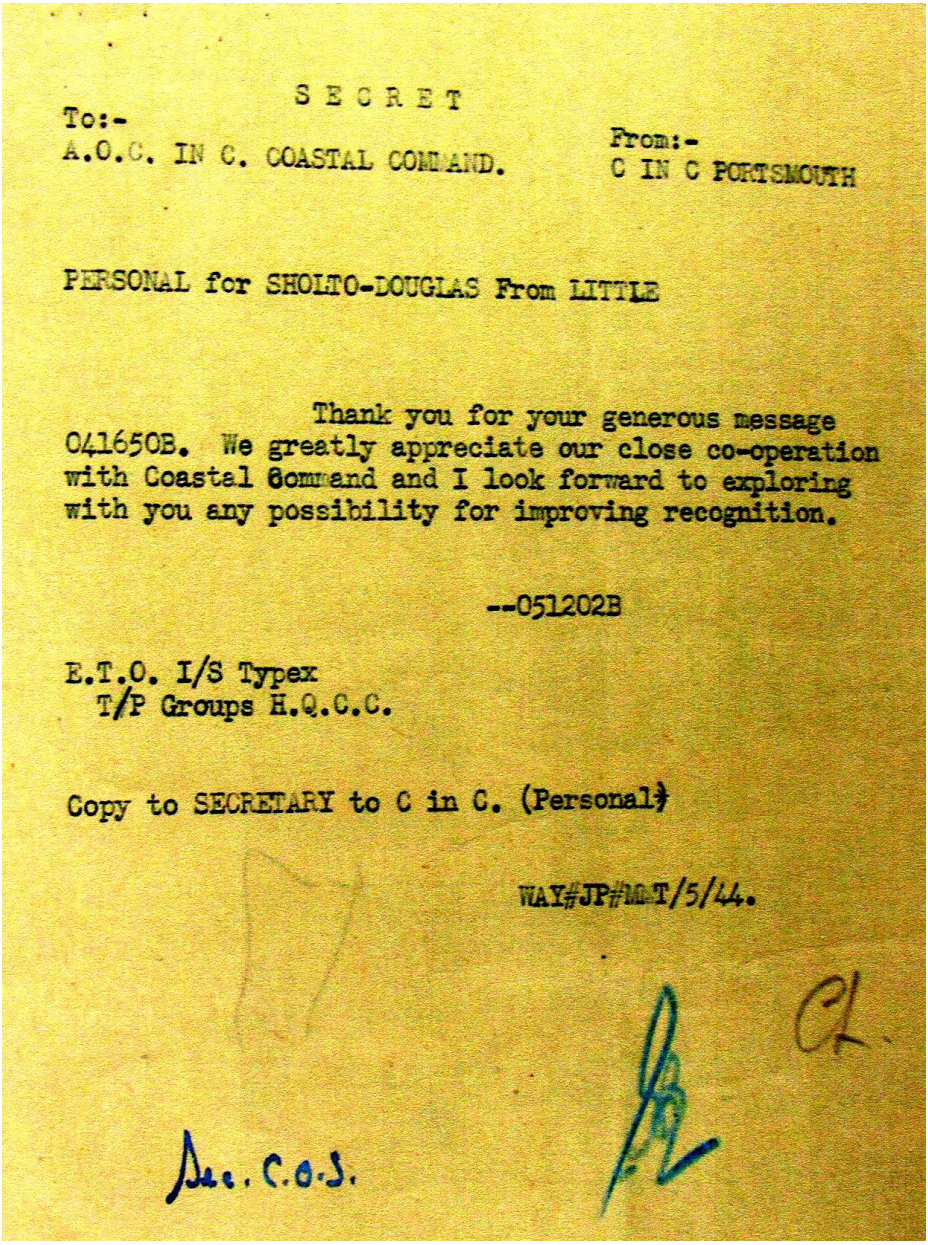
125

Pres & C in C P

130

135

Figure 11. Message relating to a 'tragic incident'.



SECRET

To:-
A.O.C. IN C. COASTAL COMMAND.

From:-
C IN C PORTSMOUTH

PERSONAL for SHOLTO-DOUGLAS From LITTLE

Thank you for your generous message 041650B. We greatly appreciate our close co-operation with Coastal Command and I look forward to exploring with you any possibility for improving recognition.

--051202B

E.T.O. I/S Typex
T/P Groups H.Q.C.C.

Copy to SECRETARY to C in C. (Personal)

WAY#JP#WLT/5/44.

C2.

Sec. C.O.S.

Figure 12. Response to previous signal. *(NA)*

The Assault

At dawn the Fabius Groups commenced their assaults on a rising tide. Figure 13 shows the areas of force responsibility The assaults were supported by the fire-power of ships positioned offshore as well as full air-cover. (The orders forbade the use of live ammunition except at Slapton Sands.)

Few of the capital ships taking part in the later bombardment of the French coast were deployed, but many smaller craft were, mainly destroyers. Those supporting the Hayling exercise included *Swift, Impulsive, Scorpion, Woodstock, Regina, Albrington* and the Polish destroyers *Krakowiak, and Slazak. Swift* was commanded by the uncle of the cricketer David Gower whose forebear had captained an 18th century HMS *Swift*. In the subsequent operation, *Swift* hit a mine and was sunk.

Four landing beaches were laid out for Hayling, spread between Staunton Avenue and Eastoke Corner. They were named; Fox Red, Fox Green, Easy Red and Easy Green respectively.

The following items show the make-up of the forces 'invading' Hayling and their operational orders. Figures 14 and 15 show the Forces involved and their Military Objectives. The map in Figure 16 shows an overview of this stage of the exercise.

Landing ships supporting the Fox landings included HMS *Kingsmill,* (local command ship) *Empire Lance, Empire Rapier, Empire Halberd and Empire Mace.* Ships supporting the Easy landings included *Arquebus, Glenroy, Spearhead and Crossbow*. Fox landings were mainly infantry and support vehicles, while Easy landings were mainly the heavier vehicles. The make-up of the assault craft involved are shown in Figures 17 and 18.

Thus, at 7.30, over 200 landing ships and craft descended on their designated Hayling beaches phased over several hours and unloaded the equipment and men of the 50th (Northumbrian) Division for the attack. After unloading, craft withdrew from the beaches to allow later waves to land. They subsequently returned to re-embark many of the forces to

return them to their encampments to wait for the real event on the 6 June. Figure 19 shows a map issued to Oliver Perks to use in the Fabius 2 Assault.

Figure 20 shows this in greater detail

Several figures now show pictures taken during the exercise. Figure 21 shows troops en-route. Figures 22, 23 and 24 show landings near Norfolk Crescent and Figures 25, 26 and 27 show those at the bottom of Seagrove Avenue. Figure 28 suggests a satisfactory outcome. Figures 29 and 30 show views of Gold Beach today.

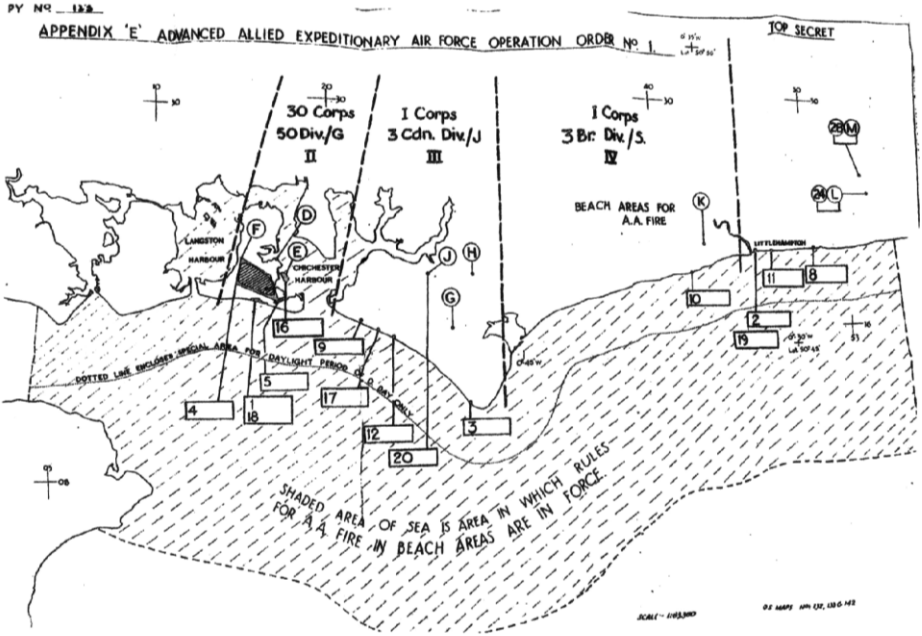


Figure 13. Areas of Military Responsibility for the various landings. *(NA)*

FABIUS 2 (3/4 May 1944)

Exercise Objective.

Hayling represents part of the European Coast on which Gold Force is to land; 50 Northumbrian Division is to attack and seize the line: Hermitage (Emsworth) - Bedhampton - Farlington by last light on the day of the exercise.

Landing Beaches are:

Fox Red (bottom of Staunton Avenue),
Fox Green (Approx. Seacourt),
Easy Red (Bound Lane),
Easy Green (Eastoke Corner).

Units taking part:

50 Northumbrian Division, made up of:
anti-tank batteries Royal Artillery (RA),
self-propelled regiments RA,
1 heavy anti-aircraft regiment RA,
light anti-aircraft regiment RA,
armoured regiments,
1 Royal Marine armoured support regiment,
4 heavy machine gun platoons,
4 heavy mortar platoons, etc.

This exercise involves some 230 landing craft, 12 ships and some 10 000 men with air support

Figure 14. Summary of Fabius II objectives. *(NA)*

Military Plan for landings.
Landing time: 0730 approx.

Phase I

231 Brigade to land on Easy sector and seize line Mengham Salterns - Mengham House - Road Junction (UR Church).
69 Brigade to land on Fox sector and seize line Rook (St Mary's Road) - Hayling Station.

Phase II

231 Brigade to seize line Mill Rythe - Fleet (Copse Lane).
69 Brigade seize line Road junction, (Copse Lane) - coast near top bend of West Lane.
56 Brigade to land Easy sector,
151 Brigade to land Fox sector.

Phase III

69 Brigade mobile column to seize North Hayling halt Phase IV
231 Brigade mop up beach defences and consolidate.
56 Brigade to seize line Emsworth (Hermitage) - Havant
151 Brigade to seize line Havant - Bedhampton

Figure 15. Summary of Assault Objectives and Movements up Hayling after Fabius 2 landing.

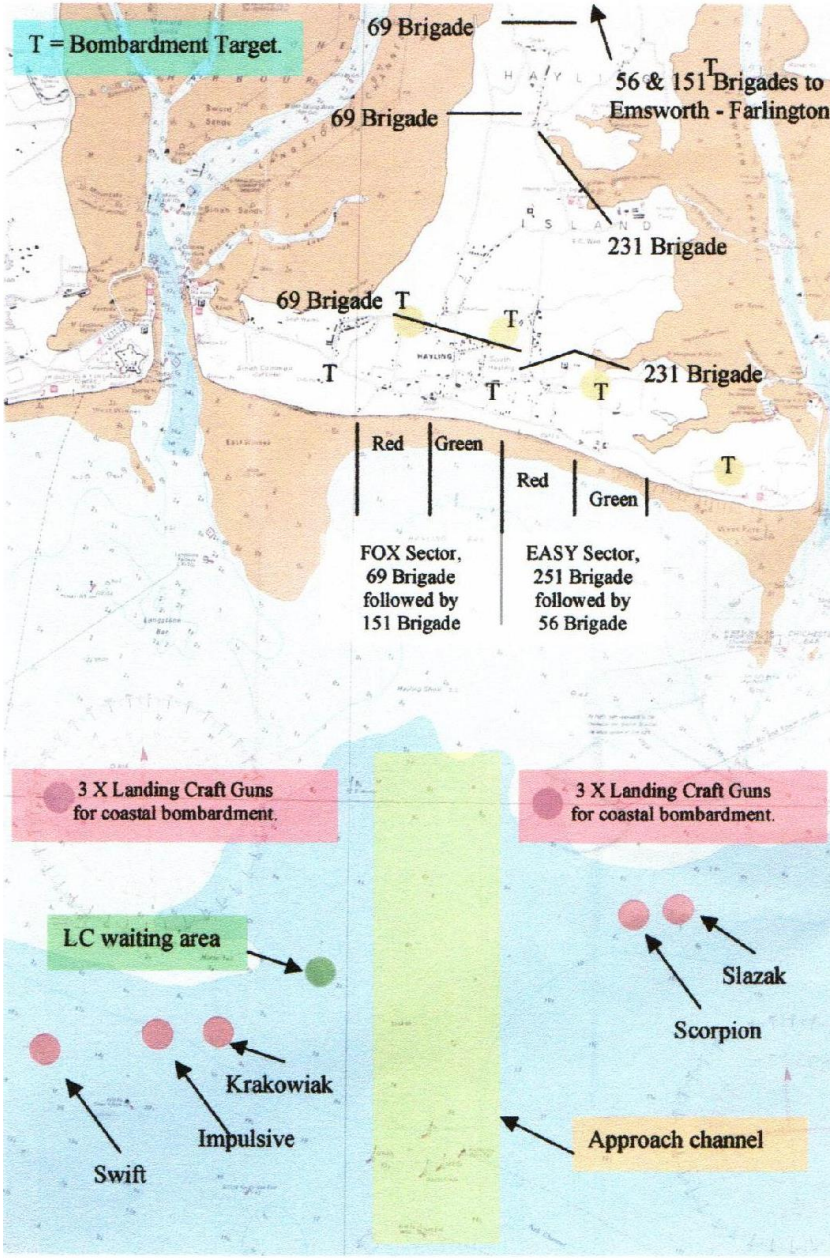


Figure 16. Disposition of naval forces, landing beaches and movements on Hayling.

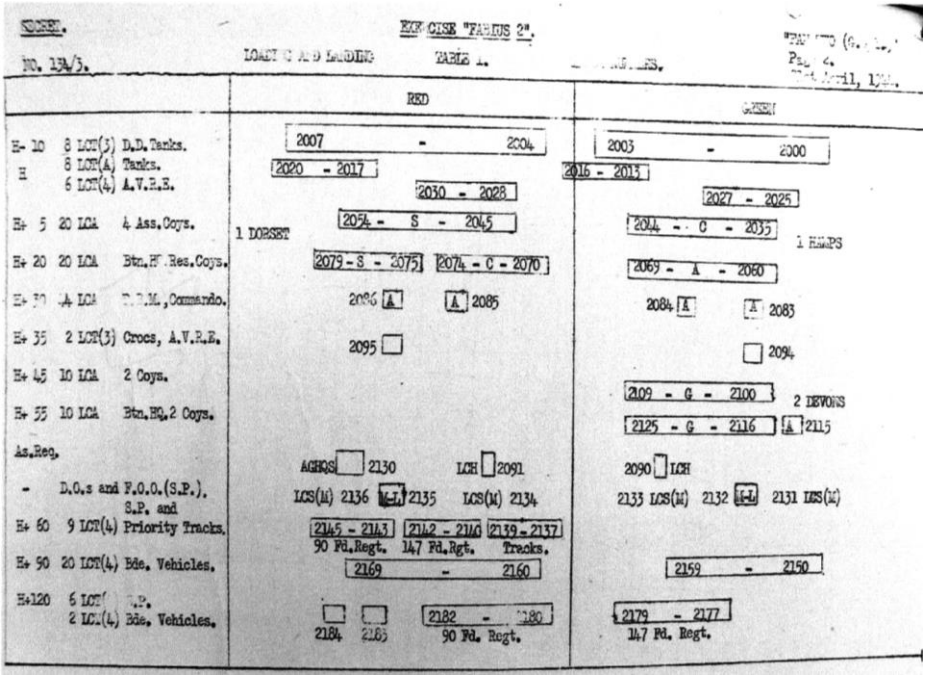


Figure 17. Disposition of landing craft on Easy beach, Hayling Island. Each numbered block indicates a group of craft. Ships named are landing ships launching the associated individual landing craft. *(NA)*

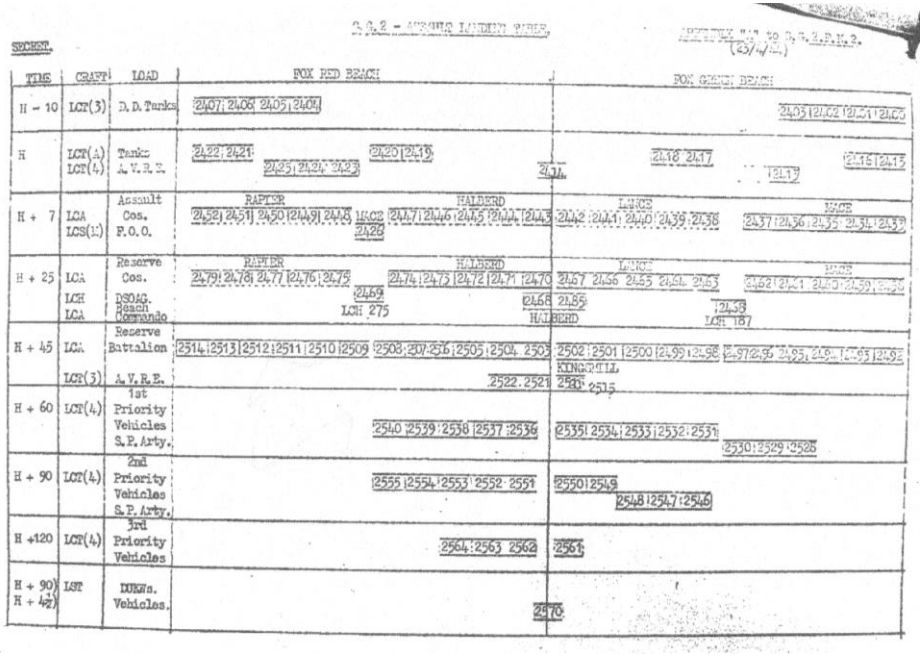


Figure 18. Disposition of landing craft on Fox beach, Hayling Island. *(NA)*

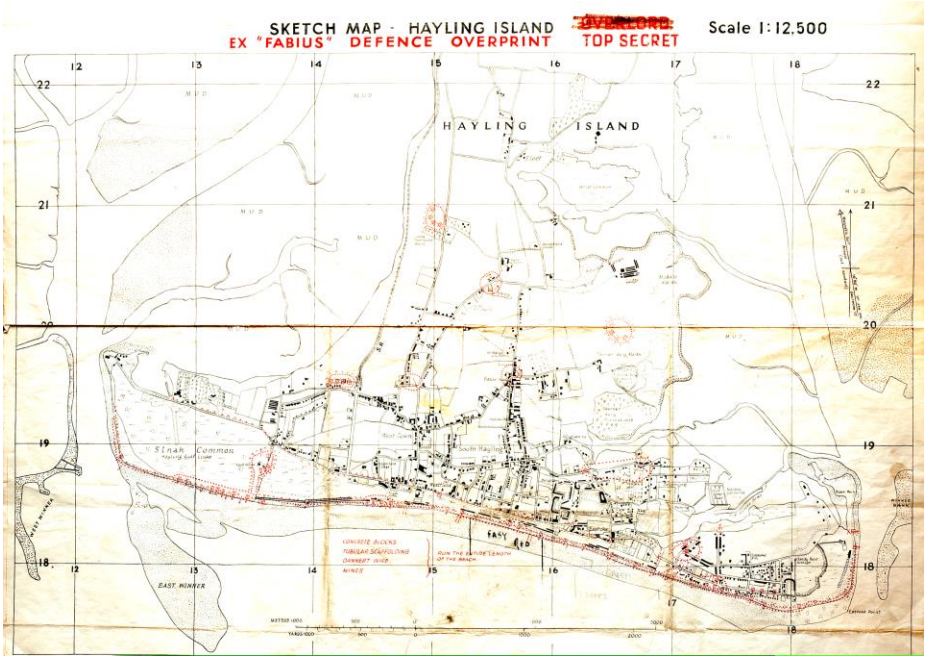


Figure 19. Assault map supplied to and by Oliver Perks, 90th Regiment Royal Artillery. *(DDM)*

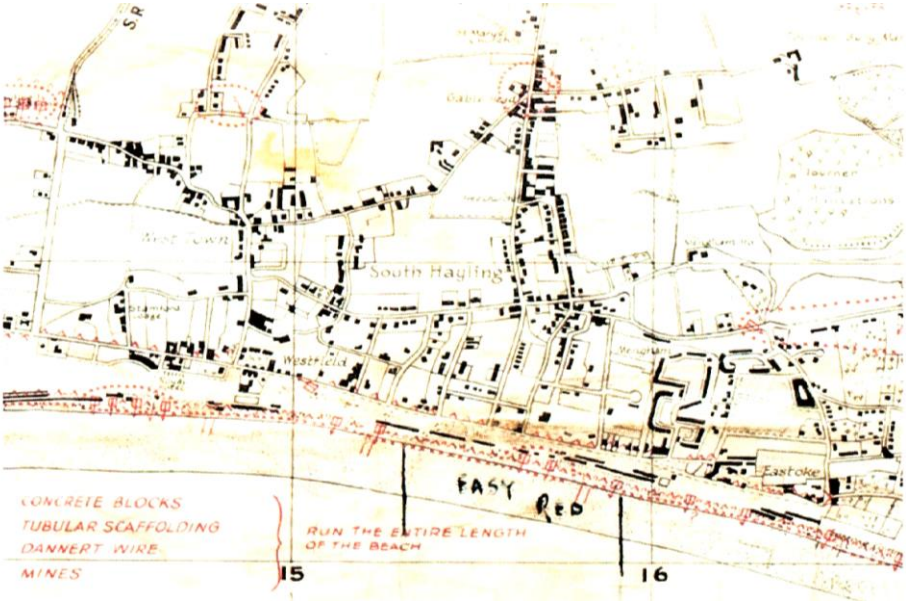


Figure 20. Detail of previous map showing 'Easy Red' beach. Obstructions and targets are in red. (Note pencil annotations.) 1st Hampshire Regiment landing on Easy Green beach, Eastoke Corner. *(DDM)*

Figure 21. En route to Hayling Island. *(IWM)*

Figure 22. Troops landing on Fox Red beach near Norfolk Crescent. *(IWM)*

Figure 23. Troops landing on Fox Red near Crescent. *(IWM)*

Figure 24. Troops landing on Fox Red beach near Crescent. *(IWM)*

Figure 25. Easy Red Beach looking west. *(IWM)*

Figure 26. Easy Red beach, note houses still existing. *(IWM)*

Figure 27. Easy Red beach, note Dual-Drive (DD) tank in foreground with its canvas canopy folded down. *(IWM)*

TOP SECRET

18

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
G-3 WAR ROOM

TOP SECRET
IMMEDIATE

SPECIAL BULIETIN NO. 2

Received from ANCXF at 0900 hours, 4 May, '44

EXERCISE "FABIUS"

All assault forces have been landed according to plan.

Time of landing has not been received.

Time of Issue: 0930 hours, 4 May, 1944.

Distribution:

A. C. of S., G-3 Div.
Chief, Plans and Ops Section, G-3 Div.
D/Chief, Plans and Ops Section, G-3 Div.
Chief, Ops A Sub-Section, G-3 Div.
Chief, Ops B Sub-Section, G-3 Div.

Figure 28. A happy ending?

Figure 30. Mulberry Harbour Phoenix breakwaters at Arromanches, September 2009.

Phoenix breakwaters

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A line of Phoenix elements forming a breakwater at Arromanches.

The Phoenix breakwaters were a set of reinforced concrete caissons built as part of the artificial Mulberry harbours that were assembled as part of the follow-up to the Normandy landings during World War Two. They were constructed by civil engineering contractors around the coast of Britain. They were collected at Dungeness and Selsey, and then towed by tugboats across the English Channel and sunk to form the Mulberry harbour breakwaters replacing the initial 'Gooseberry' block ships. Further caisson were added in the autumn of 1944 to re-enforce the existing structure to cope with the harbour continuing in use longer than planned.

Several Phoenix breakwaters are still in use in Britain: two are part of the harbour off Castletown at Portland Harbour and two can be dived in less than 10 metres of water off Pagham. There is also a smaller Phoenix Caisson (type C) in Langstone Harbour.

A pair of Phoenixes at Portland Harbour

The broken Phoenix Caisson (type C) in Langstone Harbour near the ferry

My Wartime Experiences

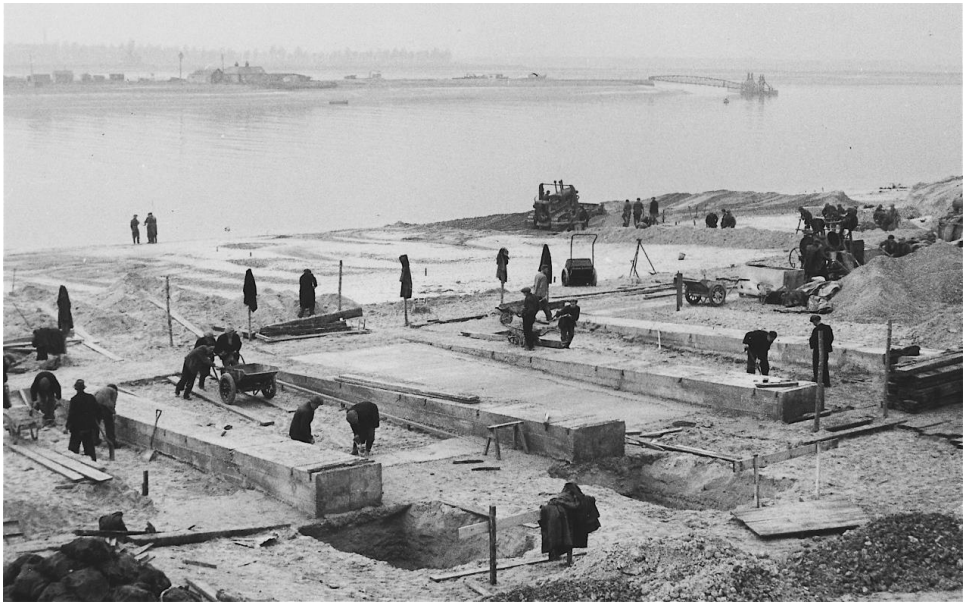
John Freeston

One of the most remarkable achievements of the 2nd World War took place under the noses of the people in the Havant area. Under the code name *Phoenix*, several vast concrete *caissons* which formed part of the *Mulberry Harbours*, were built in record time on the shores of Hayling Island. The operation was very 'hush-hush' and much excitement and speculation was rife in the area. Sir Winston Churchill paid a visit to the works, travelling by rail to Havant and thence by car. Skilled workmen were brought in by coaches from the mainland. After the bombing of Coventry, special trains carrying rubble for use in making the concrete were run to the South Coast.

On D-Day the caissons were towed to the French coast to form *moles* in the artificial harbours for landing troops, equipment and stores. One caisson sank in Langstone Harbour soon after it was taken in tow, and it can still be seen today. The caissons varied in size, the largest being 200 feet long and 60 feet high, weighing some 6,000 tons. The firm Airspeed, who made aircraft components, was at Langstone Village in the garden and paddock of Langstone Towers and a Sheet Metal Factory was at the rear of the Dolphin Hotel, West Street (where the Meridian Centre entrance is).

When the war started I was 16 and with my twin brother Peter worked at Carrell's in South Street Havant. We both went there as apprentices straight from school – me as a brick layer and Peter as a carpenter. After we finished our apprenticeship we were sent to Lake Road, Portsmouth, and helped with the bomb damage. Mr Bevin then called up everybody whose registration number ended in 0 or 9 – that included Peter and me – and we had to immediately report to Portsmouth Dockyard. We were to work on the *Mulberry Harbours* for Bovis. We were fitted with duffel coats and wire cutters and were well looked after. The only day we had off with pay was when they floated the harbours – and then when Field Marshall Montgomery came to thank the workers we had an hour off!

Phoenix breakwaters under construction at Hayling Island



Now it Can be Told – Top Secret at the Gun Site

Vic Pierce Jones

The COPPS (Combined Operations units) now commemorated on Hayling Seafront, were not the Island's only contribution to success on D-Day. The late Fred Ryder, who was for some time Battery Quartermaster Sergeant at the Gun Site (opposite Sinah Warren) used to tell an amusing but revealing story of those times. One day a panicky young officer appeared at the Gun Site office, now a residence in Sinah Lane, demanding to borrow the unit's Matador lorry. These were standard army vehicles for transporting men and materials. The Matador was similar in size to the Champion ('Champ') but had the advantage of a tow bar at the rear making it ideal for towing, in their case the Gun Site's 3.7 inch anti-aircraft guns, which were mounted on wheels.

The officer's request was turned down at once, seen as a 'damned cheek'. No unit worth its while would have risked lending such useful equipment to any one without special permission from higher up. What made it worse was that the officer wouldn't say what he wanted to use the Matador for, only saying it was Top Secret. Eventually after a lot of phone calls and arguments permission was given for a few hours only. Fearfully the Hayling Gunners watched their Matador disappear towards the ferry. A few hours later it was returned.

Unfortunately a few days later the officer reappeared, still panicky, asking for it to be loaned again. He still would not let them know what for. This time the Gunners were prepared. They detailed a discrete observation group to slip down to the ferry to see what was going on. What they saw explained every thing. Half way across Langstone Harbour mouth a tank was stuck in the mud. Once again ropes and chains were slung from the Matador and the tank restored to dry land, though a somewhat undignified recovery it had to be said.

It is quite likely that this indeed was a Top Secret effort to get amphibious tanks able to support the infantry on the D-Day landings. Probably the trials were the brain child of one of Hayling's residents of those days,

author and aeroplane manufacturer Nevil Shute (Norway.) He had come to live at Pond Head when his home in Southsea became vulnerable to bombing. Whilst here he conducted secret projects on the shore line of Pond Head and elsewhere on Hayling the experiments at the mouth of Langstone Harbour being the most important. Though the ones needing to be cleared up by the Matadors were failures others did succeed and British troops did get tank support on D-Day using floatation buoyancy of one sort or another. In this they were luckier than their American allies who had no tank support e.g. at their landings on Omaha beach which suffered heavy casualties.

Fred Ryder described how he came to the Hayling Gun Site with an advance party of Gunners about Christmas 1941. They found the site still deserted and damaged after a heavy attack by parachute bombs which drifted onto Hayling from seawards on 17/18th April of that year. Six men were killed and their names are honoured at one of the gun pits today. One of these bombs dangled for hours from a tree at the junction of Sinah Lane and Park Road, forcing West Town residents to divert to Beachlands if they wanted to get to Mengham.

On his first night at the site Fred described exploring the area walking along the dark and deserted road when suddenly there was an enormous bang. No bombs this time. It was caused by a relief valve in the sewage system of those days. For Islanders a bigger threat came down the road at the junction of Staunton Avenue and the Sea Front. A clutch of incendiary bombs released by the Luftwaffe intended to scatter on their way down, actually failed to be released and there was a huge conflagration where today there is nothing but peace, calm and blackberry bushes.

Later on Fred's biggest surprise came when he happened to be taking a shower at the office HQ. To his alarm he heard the voices of young ladies downstairs. He struggled to make himself presentable and found they were the first draught of ATS to man the unit. They soon came to play their part in the war effort, using apparatus for range and direction finding to guide the guns. It was stoutly denied they ever fired any of the guns. One ATS girl is believed to have been killed. A mystery from those

days was that when one of the defensive pill boxes was cleared up after the war clothes and other personal items revealed that someone had been living there incognito. Actually one family did take to a pill box near Sinah during night time raids and at least one Islander was born there. When Fred's unit left Hayling they joined the Eighth Army in the Mediterranean.

The Sinah Gun Site

Sinah Heavy Anti-Aircraft battery. *(The News.)*

Built in 1940, the camp formed part of the extensive defences against German air attack on Portsmouth during World War 2.

The site consisted of four gun emplacements armed with 4.5 inch naval guns. Close by were accommodation buildings, ammunition stores and the command and control buildings. At first it was manned by Royal Artillery Gunners of 219 battery (57th Heavy Anti-Aircraft regiment) then later by men of the 368 and 16 Heavy Anti-Aircraft battery.

Hayling Island and Langstone acted as an elaborate decoy to protect Portsmouth. Structures in Special Fire sites were filled with oil and then set alight, to trick the bomber pilots into thinking that Langstone Harbour was the Dockyard.

During he night of 17th & 18th April 1941 German bombers targeted Portsmouth. The decoys were employed and they worked. Unfortunately the Sinah Heavy Anti-Aircraft battery received a direct hit, resulting in fatalities and injuries to men of 219 battery. All of the buildings were

either destroyed or damaged and the site remained out of action until December 1941.

A plaque commemorating Royal Artillery Gunners James Bardoe, James Collingbine, Arthur Farmer, Reginald Knight, James Powell, and Leonard Ward, who died that night, hangs in one of the remaining emplacements.

Today the site is a scheduled Ancient Monument, one of the best preserved of its kind. It is part owned by Havant Borough Council and Hayling Golf Club. In 2008 English Heritage undertook a major project with funding from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund to stabilise the emplacement next to Sinah Lake thus helping to preserve the monument for future generations.

See also: www BBC - WW2 People's War – The bombing of Sinah Battery.

One of a number of pill boxes that can be seen on Hayling Island

The Auxiliary Territorial Service (A.T.S.) on Sinah Warren, 1942-43

Memories by Hazel Gould (née Plumbly), 22 November 2013

Joan Reid, self and Gladys Mallow on Hayling Island beach by the Golf Club, August 1942.

I volunteered to join the A.T.S. in March 1942 and after 3 weeks initial training in Honiton, 6 weeks training on Radar equipment in Devizes and further training at a Firing Camp in Bude, I was posted to Hayling Island to join the 458 [M] Heavy Ack Ack (A.A.) Regiment as a Radar Operator or as we were known initially 'G.L. Girls'! (Gun Layers). Half of the Regiment were on Sinah Warren and half were in Northney. This was one of the early mixed A.A. Regiments to have been formed – with A.T.S. girls manning the Radar, also the Predictor and Height & Range Finder, as well as Cooks and Orderlies.

The Radar Girls were billeted in Nissen Huts in Ferry Road opposite the camp. Our beds were pretty hard and consisted of a main frame with 3 'biscuits' [little mattresses], 3 hairy blankets, 2 sheets and pillow. Shared ablutions were available within the Nissen Hut with a bath that you had to put your name down for! Meals were served in the Mess on the Main Site.

The G.L. girls were in teams of 6 on each shift and the Radar sets were manned 24 hours, each shift being from 7am to 3pm, 3pm to 11pm and 11pm to 7am. At this time the Radar set was a Mark II – consisting of a Transmitter, Receiver and a Power Unit – four girls in the Receiver and two in the Transmitter. The girls who worked in the Transmitter were also responsible for starting up the Power Unit – not an easy task on a cold winter's night – as we had to swing a heavy wooden handle to get the thing going!! Sometimes at night, the Prowler Guard was around to help when they were in difficulties!

When on duty we were based in a Manning Hut and the Team had to carry out maintenance on the sets – climbing up the ladder on top of the Receiver to clean the dipoles – also maintaining the Power Unit with N160 oil in the sump and the rocker boxes and generally keeping everything clean and maintained, ready for action.

When 'Action Stations' were called and the site fully manned, the information from the Radar was sent to the Predictor which gave the guns the position for firing.

There were many exercises, day and night, when everyone was on site, to keep us on our toes!! The Radar was "ON WATCH" at various times during the day and night – searching the skies for enemy aircraft and from time to time picking up our bombers coming back from a raid; we were able to identify these by an I.F.F. (Identification, Friend or Foe) signal which would appear on a small cathode ray tube above the No. I position in the Receiver cabin. A Non-Commisioned-Officer was in charge and passed all the information to the Command Post by telephone. In the Receiver there were 3 Cathode Ray Tubes each one operated by a member of the team, showing the Range, Bearing and Height of the incoming aircraft. During the Dieppe raid the whole site was manned 24 hours a day for 5 days continuously.

When off duty and on site, there were lectures on Aircraft Recognition and other subjects also visits by the Padre. When completely off duty and with a pass, once a week, we could take the 'Puffing Billy' to Havant, or go

down to the Ferry to cross over and catch the bus to Portsmouth. Sometimes we would just walk down to our local pub the Shades for a drink or the Barley Mow which then was a small country pub where we played darts and shove ha'penny. The one shop was called ‘Clapps’ where you could buy small items.

During the summer we were allowed to walk down to the beach by the Golf Club. There were dances in the N.A.A.F.I. (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes) from time to time when the local sailors were able to attend along with troops from the Special Boat Squadron at Nabs Head.

In September 1943 I was promoted and posted to Liverpool Docks and another Regiment – so what transpired on Hayling Island after that I have no knowledge.

However, I have always felt that insufficient acknowledgement was given to all the girls of the A.T.S. who served on Gun Sites during the war, as after all, for a while, we were the FRONTLINE IN DEFENCE OF THE REALM!!!

D-Day on Hayling

Leading Wren, Sheila Troke, née, Lauchlan, spent the night before D-Day 1944 on duty in her office on the south-east corner of the first floor of the Royal Hotel, on Hayling sea front. She was a Signals Distribution Wren but a period of silence had been ordered. This meant no wireless messages, no outside phone messages, no morse or flash signals. So she had nothing to do all night. There was a noise outside so she turned the lights off, took the blackout down and looked out. What she saw was history being made in the sea off Hayling. One window faced east over the funfair, but the main window looked south across Beachlands towards the sea. She saw hundreds of boats passing Hayling on the way to the invasion beaches of Normandy. *I've never seen anything like it before or since,* says Sheila. But her main impression was the noise of all the engines. *It was tremendous!* says Sheila. There was a phone line to the 'Wrennery' in the Victoria Hotel, on the corner of Beach Road and Westfield Avenue, now the site of part of Mark Anthony Court. Her friend Peggy was taking time off there and Sheila reported what she could see. Most of the young men they had mixed with on Hayling were on those boats and had gone. Few came back. The next day Hayling seemed deserted. It was quite eerie. So Sheila and Peggy spent the day playing tennis in the garden of 2 Staunton Avenue.

For months Sheila had been working at HMS *Dragonfly*, established at the Royal in June 1943. It was a Combined Operations 'Suspense Base', for holding and training servicemen preparing for the invasion. Further down the seafront Suntrap School, now converted into luxury apartments, was their medical centre and dental surgery. Sheila specially remembers the kindness of a Voluntary Aid Detachment Nurse who attended the sick bay there. After the war she became an air hostess but was killed in a crash. Next door to the Royal Hotel, the Norfolk Crescent was packed with tough Canadian troops, who were 'very wild' and wrecked the place. Says Sheila *the whole Island was packed with so many thousands of soldiers you'd think it would sink!*

Dragonfly looked after the invasion barges moored round the coast, especially in Langstone harbour. They weren't the very large craft such as

landed troops for the assault but smaller vessels which ferried men and equipment to and from bigger ships out to sea. They were big enough to carry maybe two tanks or cars plus about a dozen men. In Langstone harbour they had practised going backwards and forwards, again and again, to get the manoeuvres correct. The skippers of these boats were very young and inexperienced. Sheila remembers how one Midshipman, aged only about seventeen, took out a landing craft with the ramp still down. It sank at once and had to be recovered at low tide.

In those days Sheila was an eighteen-year old Wren, as the Woman's Royal Naval Service was known. She was one of eight STOs, switchboard officers, and eight SDOs, signal distribution officers. The main switchboard was in a concrete bunker in the garden of a house named Brooklyn, on the south corner of Bacon Lane and Beach Road. They were guarded by a steel-helmeted sentry with rifle and bayonet at the ready They worked shifts of eight hours on, twelve off, on a three or four day rota. At nights they worked from 8pm to 8am and got 36 hours off, unless one of the other girls reported sick and someone had to stand in for her. The bunker was dismantled in 1945 and there are no signs of it today.

When off duty they slept eight to a room in a house in Bacon Lane, named Goldersley. There were only two other houses in Bacon Lane in those days. They were catered for in the 'Wrennery'. Security everywhere was very tight. One evening she was walking on the beach with new, squeaky shoes and she was told if she couldn't be quiet she would have to walk in the sea to stop the noise. She remembers being frightened when they were stopped by a sentry who pointed a rifle and bayonet at their chests. He ordered them to approach one by one to show their passes. Security was especially tight towards Eastoke and no one was permitted on Sandy Point. The COPPs (Combined Operations Pilotage Pioneers) were stationed at the Sailing Club. At night they used to see their 'fast, little motor boats' speeding across the Channel to survey the beaches for the D-Day landings.

Sheila is positive that Churchill and Eisenhower visited Hayling beach at least once, probably twice, but she can't remember anything about

General Montgomery being there. Despite stories to the contrary, she says that none of these wartime leaders actually visited the Royal Hotel or stood on the balcony to watch the practise landings as is said. But 'Winnie' and 'Ike' did walk quite a way along the sand towards the sand dunes at Gunner Point, studying the terrain carefully, because Hayling beach was similar to the beaches planned for the D-Day landings. Exactly a month before D-Day they watched the practice landings known as Operation Fabius. The troops selected for the first wave of the assault on June 6th were taken round the Isle of Wight from Gosport and practised landing on Hayling Beachlands. Nobody was actually allowed to watch them and Islanders were told to keep their curtains drawn

Sheila's friend, Peggy, had a boyfriend, Gerry Cole, who was Company Sergeant Major of the Royal Marines. He was a very smart man, six foot four inches tall with beautifully polished boots. He went with the invasion fleet on D-Day. When he came back he was literally on his knees with fatigue and shock. He said the noise alone of the guns and bombs on the invasion beaches was 'absolutely shattering'. Said Sheila *we had to carry him to bed.*

Sheila was full of praise for the Ack-Ack (anti-aircraft) Gunners at Sinah gun site. *They were crack shots and hit many enemy planes*. Sheila's fiancé, Alick Troke, was a Sick Bay Chief Petty Officer whose post was in a bungalow named Rinkaby, on the north corner of Staunton Avenue and St Helen's Road. The doctor's surgery was on the left of the front door and Alick's clinic and dispensary were on the right side. One day a stray land mine, probably jettisoned by a fleeing enemy bomber, fell somewhere between the bungalow and Station Road, causing huge damage. The wall of the dispensary was wrecked and all his bottles of medicines and pills were smashed and thrown around. He swept them up with the rest of the debris and threw them all away. *What else can I do?* he said.

One of his jobs was to distribute the First Aid boxes to the invasion barges before they left. They each included a small bottle of medicinal brandy but these had a habit of disappearing. So he took them out and when he delivered the boxes to the skippers of the barges he handed them the

brandy separately. He said: *What harm could they do? They were small bottles and most of the skippers were very young.*

Hayling in those days was quite different to now, says Sheila. *It was really just country with two or three villages. Beach Road has changed beyond recognition. It used to be all houses with really beautiful gardens.* For entertainment they used to have camp dances, concerts and 'sixpenny hop' dances. Occasionally professional entertainers came down in the official company known as ENSA. One famous personality was a singer, Anne Shelton. *But the officers 'pinched' her and entertained her in the ward room.* The Wrens used to go often to the Regal Cinema in Mengham. *But it was full of fleas and they had a job to get rid of them for days afterwards.* Their favourite pubs were the Royal Shades and the West Town Hotel. Sometimes in the evening they would stroll down Hollow Lane to the Mengham fish and chip shop, but it was usually only for chips or potato cakes, fish was rare.

Dragonfly shut down on 15 January 1946. Sheila married Alick and they stayed on Hayling for some time after the war. For a while they lived in the basement of a hotel, which was then situated at the east end of the Crescent. It was considered a very good address with its fabulous views. Then she lived down the Ferry Road before moving to Malta, then returning to England and a house in Cowplain. Alick always wanted to return to living on Hayling but sadly he passed away.

Sheila served as a Liberal Democrat Councillor on Havant Borough Council, representing Hart Plain Ward.

Members of the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties pose for a group photograph at Fort Blockhouse prior to D-Day operations. Less than 200 men won over 90 medals and commendations in three years.

COPP memorial on Hayling Beach

'Miles Aweigh' on Hayling

by

Ron A Miles

Edited by: Tony Higham, typed by Alyson Griffin

Introduction

These are the recollections of Ronald Arthur Miles that were gathered in and around Hayling Island during his service in the Navy in World War Two. They have been especially written to complement his fascinating book, *Miles Aweigh*, that describes his experiences during and after that war. This new version contains additional and more detailed material about Hayling than is in his book. Contact was made with Ron Miles following a request in The Kedge Anchor for people able to relate their experiences of Hayling

Ron Miles' book, held by HCC Library Services, starts in September 1941 when … I was required to get myself down to HMS *Collingwood* … and then goes on to describe his training and subsequent life in landing craft and Combined Operations. At times, Ron was based at each of HMS *Northney* I, II & III.

These operations covered the Boulogne raid, the ill-feted Dieppe raid that resulted in the almost total annihilation of the Royal Regiment of Canada, extensive landings in the Mediterranean, D-Day itself and then those taking place in the Far East. After the war Ron re-joined the Navy and finally retired after ten-year's service.

After the war the Landing Craft Association held a number of reunions in Hayling and in 2011 came to Hayling for the last time. During that final visit the Association held a packed and moving ceremony at St Mary's church on Hayling and 'laid up' their battle honours standard and this is normally on display in the church, After the ceremony a reception was held at the Hayling British Legion.

Ron was born in London and was still going strong in 2011 and was then living at Juniper Hill, Oxfordshire.

To place a context on his subsequent narrative it is worth summarising his career as follows:

Seaman Miles – Key Dates and Actions

Born West Hampstead London 12th April 1922
Joined Royal Navy Fareham 30th September 1941
The Slipper Raid 3rd May 1942
Operation Jubilee Dieppe Raid 18th August 1942
Operation Torch North Africa Landings 8th November 1942
Operation Husky Sicily Landings 10th July 1943
D-Day Normandy Landings 6th June 1944
Operation Zipper Port Swettenham Landings 9th September 1945
Occupation of Bangkok. Late September 1945
Demobbed Rosneath 6th April 1946
Rejoined Holborn 2nd October 1946
Demobbed Portsmouth 5th March 1952

Able Seaman Miles – Ships and Bases

30th Sept 1941 HMS *Collingwood*, Fareham
HMS *Victory*, Portsmouth Barracks
HMS *Broadway,* ex-WWI US destroyer
HMS *Northney* I, Hayling Island ex-Holiday camp; LCAs
1942 HMS *Queen Emma*, Converted Dutch North Sea ferry; LSI-(M)
HMS *Prince Charles*, Converted Belgium North Sea ferry; LSI-(M)
HMS *Northney* II, Hayling Island ex-holiday camp
HMS *Manatee*, Isle of Wight
HMS *Glengyle*, LCAs
HMS *Rosneath*, River Clyde LCA base
PSNV *Reina de Pacifico*, Converted ocean going liner; LSI (L)
Westcliff on Sea, Essex
1943 HMS *Rosneath*, River Clyde
PSNV *Reina de Pacifico*, Converted ocean going liner; LSI (L)
MV *Tegelberg*, Converted Dutch cargo liner; LSI (L)
HMS *Edinburgh Castle*, Temporary in the River Clyde
1944 HMS *Quebec,* Loch Fyne landing craft base
Variety Theatre, Southampton
Petrol Barge, 36th Flotilla Normandy
HMS *Northney* III, Hayling Island ex-Holiday camp
Port Sunlight Soap Works
HMS *Dundonald*, Scottish army camp
LST 382, Passage to Burma
LST 156, Passage to Ceylon

HMS *High Flyer*, Trincomalee
SS *Antenor*, Passage back to UK
1945 HMS *Rosneath*, River Clyde
6th April 1945 HMS *Victory*, Portsmouth barracks
2nd Oct 1946 HMS *Victory*, Portsmouth barracks
HMS *Howe*, Weymouth; battleship
1947 HMS *Cadiz*, Fleet destroyer; Home Fleet
HMS *Howe*, Weymouth; battleship
1949 HMS *King George V*, Weymouth; battleship
1950 Bincleaves Portland Bill; experimental torpedo base
1951 HMS *Battleaxe*, Fleet destroyer; Home Fleet
1952 Control Tower Portsmouth Dockyard

'Miles Aweigh' on Hayling

Late in 1941, with my hammock and kitbag, I repaired to the Heavy Gun Battery in the Portsmouth Naval Base, to board a lorry which finally solved the mystery of HMS *Northney*. The lorry was to take me and a few others across Portsmouth town and into the country to Havant, and then to cross the bridge over the tidal creek on to Hayling Island.

Just across the bridge to the left, was a small holiday camp from pre-war days, being barely an hour from the barracks! This small camp was laid out in rows of wee chalets, a posh name for huts, made it seemed from old tea chests. There was a larger hall that was used for dining, and the usual associated structures, none of which was of a permanent nature.

Leaving the lorry and going into the office, I was allocated one of these small huts, and a chitty, and then did the 'Routine' (collecting my kit). The little hut contained a single metal bed – no bedding, and an old Valor paraffin oil heater. Having my faithful mick with me, sleeping would not pose a problem, and for the rest I should have to live out of my kitbag.
In front of the doorways, off the line of the chalets was a large field enclosed by a grass embankment In vain I searched for the sea, and the sea-planes that I had been led to believe were serviced here, seemed non-existent. As it was winter and it got dark early, I snuggled down into my bed the slept the sleep of the innocent, while blessing my mick.

The next morning, after Wakey! Wakey! I arose as dawn was beginning to break. I looked out of the chalet door and, with the tide having made during those early hours, saw a string of Assault Landing Craft (ALCs) at

anchor beyond the green embankment around the field. I recognised them in an instant, having seen them in action on cinema newsreels. This view took me aback, not even a seaplane to be seen! My dreams of going to sea in real ships or whatever, took a jolt and these ungainly looking craft fell well below my earlier ambitions.

During this first day, I found out that the camp was named HMS *Northney* I. Over the years I discovered and got clued up on *Northney* II (Southleigh) and *Northney* III (now Lakeside, formerly Coronation)..

So now it was back to the classroom for the theory of sailing, beaching, and of 'kedging' off the beach back to sea. This was followed by being out in the boats at every opportunity, day and night, forming up in the confines of Chichester Harbour, (HMS *Northney* I being on a branch of it). We practised beaching on the stony harbour entrance at Black Point. The best teacher we had at kedging off the point with the tide on the ebb, was that if you failed, you stayed with the boat until the tide made again and then hopefully you could now kedge off successfully. It was the most desolate area, and, being winter and soaking wet, was very jolly!

More details of my Landing Craft activities elsewhere are described in my book.

It was January 1942 now, (the weather being suitable for brass monkeys) and jumping out of the boat into the sea made us blue with cold and with soaking wet clothes. Eventually we would return to the camp to the glory and warmth of the one and only Valor oil heater, and hopefully dry off before you went out in the boats and got wet all over again!

There was never a let up at the camp, we were taught to use the Thompson sub machine gun and to strip the Lewis guns, the latter being made portable. This was between PT, unarmed combat and anything else physical. For entertainment we boxed each other or, at a push, walked into Havant, but the beer there was not to my taste, so that wasn't often.

After the intense training at *Northney*, the buzz was that we would be drafted to the West Coast of Scotland, near Inverary, but not in my case. I had been taken ill with a very sore throat. The doctor did all the usual things and diagnosed diphtheria. This caused a minor howdy do, I was sent back to collect my mick and kitbag and returned to the sick bay. I was put in a room by myself and told I would be sent off to RN Hospital at Haslar, as soon as an ambulance came. In the event, no one knew of my

going, all others being away in the boats.

After a few days in hospital, I was discharged and sent on seven days leave and was told I was to return to *Northney*.

This leave had an unexpected twist as the BBC reported a Commando raid in Northern France, and when I returned to *Northney*, I found that most of the ship's company I had been training with had been drafted to take part in it and were now dispersed into other ACL flotillas around the country.

So here I was, in between as it were, when the new intake arrived to take the course, I being been far in advance of them. So the powers that be had the bright idea for me to learn basic signalling, as proper signalmen were too valuable for just boat work. So I was started on another course on learning Morse by light, sound and flags etc.

Some craft, mainly the Eureka type, were fast boats from the USA, which had been developed during the Rum Running period. They had canvas covers and were fitted with direction finding sets and Lorenz homing devices. In the main we used the Army's portable radios, the walkie-talkies of the day. These were good and worded fine over short distances but were totally useless in any other circumstances, especially when the need was vital! The best work they did was to entertain the crew on passage, tuned into the Forces Programme of the BBC. Eventually we were judged efficient, even though numerous complaints had been made by the WAAFs serving on Thorney Island, (just across the creek from HMS *Northney* I), about the atrocious language of the seamen using these Army radios.

The Lorenz device ostensibly allowed the boat to home in onto a target area, a transmitter having been previously dropped by submarine or canoeist. This worked as well as could be expected, and we had much success in practice runs.

It was bloody cold out there day and night even with somewhere to get dry and warm when you came ashore. This was not a game!

At the end of the course we had been led to expect a draft to Quebec! This was eagerly anticipated until someone said casually that the Quebec on everyone's lips was not in Canada, but a large Combined Operations Camp at Inverary, on Loch Fyne in Scotland. This was quite devastating, but of no consequence to me, as with my smattering of communications know-how, I was being sent to a landing ship in the new docks at Southampton,

HMS *Queen Emma.*

HMS *Queen Emma* was a converted Dutch North Sea ferry adapted to carry 8 ALCs in lieu of lifeboats. Her holds were converted into mess-decks to accommodate the soldiers, and these decks were quirkily named after well- known London restaurants, Quaglino's etc.

I now leave Hayling and go on my travels, to return in a little while. This period is also described in my book.

As time passed it became necessary for the *Queen Emma* to go in dock for a refit. This news brought joy to the ship's company for, according to the more erudite crew members, it would allow a two week leave for each watch, with perhaps another week or two to get ship shape. So, steaming up the Channel everyone was in a happy frame of mind, especially as we learnt the refit was to be done in London. That evening we came up through the Solent, and dropped anchor at Spithead. The next day we all expected to be London bound, but the Bosun's Mate piped that all the Landing Craft crews were, with our kitbags and hammocks, to man our Landing Craft as all 8 boats of the 2nd ACL flotilla were to leave the ship.

The Admiralty couldn't risk a passage through the Straits of Dover, because of the threat of the large German guns on the French coast. Provision had been made at the dockyard to berth our boats and to stay overnight in the Barracks. The Dockyard staff found us a sheltered spot to berth, but attempts to enter Portsmouth Barracks for the night dragged on and on until the deadlock was finally broken. They gallantly issued us with a blanket and a spot to doss down in the gymnasium. We were told of a galley and mess where we could get an early morning breakfast, return our blankets, get mustered and march back to our boats. This routine was common, as we Combined Operations sailors were more or less treated as itinerant tramps in that outfit's early days.

When all was shipshape in the boats, we made our way out of Portsmouth and through the protective boom that stretched from Portsmouth to the Isle of Wight happy to be in familiar surroundings again. It was a short trip then to my original training area of Chichester Harbour, but this time to pastures new as we entered a different creek. Here we secured our boats to buoys and came ashore in another pre-war holiday camp, much the same as HMS *Northney* I, but this was *Northney* III. At this camp we were informed we would linger until the return of HMS *Queen Emma* from her refit. Meanwhile we were to be out and about exercising with boats

etc. but would be ashore at nights.

After a lazy week mucking around in the boats, orders came for us to sail back again through Spithead to Cowes Roads. It was to us another day out in the boats. The day was very pleasant, calm, sunny and warm. Our Cox'n had no bother or trouble in keeping our flat nosed, flat bottomed, semi-plated, ten ton, oblong box on station, as we plodded along in two lines ahead. As we came nearer to the Roads, there were one or two familiar Channel ferries, converted as *Emma*, at anchor. Strangely one had no boats hoisted, her boat's falls and tackle hung idly over her sides. The whole flotilla ran around her stern, which we now saw was HMS *Prince Charles*, an ex-Belgian ferry. The boats ran along each side of the vessel, hooked on and were hoisted as easily as if we had been in *Emma*

Hoisted aboard, the boats smartly secured and given a mess for a meal, we were mustered for a talk. Getting to the mess, I needed to push through ranks of soldiers and on enquiry, I found that they were a troop of commandos and I was further informed that we, along with them, were off this very night to visit the coast of France.

The details of this episode are in my book.

After the operation, in the early morning, we saw the white cliffs ahead, and ran up on the beach at the west side of Eastbourne and discharged our soldiers. Later we kedged off the beach, and sailed in good order to enter Newhaven, where we tied up the boats of the flotilla. We squared off the boats, and were told we would have a hurried meal, march to the station and would be met at Havant for a lorry ride back to *Northney* III and our beds. Next day we did the reverse to collect our boats and sail round back to *Northney* where, secured to a buoy, we proceeded to discharge all the bits and pieces which the Commandos had left behind after being put ashore at Eastbourne. There was all sorts of gear left behind and the better pieces were put aside, to be shared among the boat's crew. My share of the spoils consisted of a 2 inch anti-tank rifle, which I did not have a clue how to use, a radio set and a commando knife. The radio would certainly enhance my hut in *Northney*, whilst the anti-tank rifle would be added to the boat's armament, something we could show off grandly to all the other boats in different flotillas.

Shipshape in Newhaven

HMS *Northney* III was much grander and better appointed than *Northney*

I, Unfortunately we never enjoyed our spoils for very long, as the army mounted a recovery raid and all seemed to disappear in a puff of smoke! We boat's crew got a nice lashing – c'est la guerre.

So here we are, back in Hayling messing about in boats and still practicing beaching. This went on for a few weeks until we heard the buzz that Emma had completed her refit and was now in Fareham Creek, an arm of Portsmouth Harbour. Now we were counting the days until we could pack our bags nod hammocks, stow them in our boats – my boat being ALC184, and sail around the coast to rejoin her.

I now leave Hayling to go on my travels as described in my book, and it was some time before I was to return.

After a successful period in Emma I left her for another pre-war holiday camp on the Isle of Wight by Yarmouth, Norton by name. Then to Scotland, continuing out to the Med and home again to Westcliff, again to Scotland before traipsing around the Cape to fetch up in the Red Sea – all the time in ALCs which were now known as LCAs! Original thinking! By this time Combined Operations had come of age, and was now a professional outfit earning respect – so much so, they gave us a badge, free.

We eventually loaded with 8th Army soldiers, went through the canal, and were now at the other end of the Mediterranean, landing on the coast of Sicily. After all our trials and tribulations, we managed a trip back to Scotland, carrying 5,000 Italian POWs. The vessel I was now in was to continue, but I was again left in hospital, after which I finally got to Quebec! Before I could turn round, I was in a barge in Southampton water, living in the bombed Music Hall, opposite the Guildhall. It was open air living, but a great change from ship life, to be able to walk the streets at nights, maybe get a beer if they hadn't sold out and to be awakened in the morning by the hymn playing pealing bells of the Guildhall – wonderful. Just down the road by Pirelli's cable factory was a large shed that we used as a mess hall.

As things began to warm up in 1944, in readiness for the coming invasion of Europe, lorries, tanks, plus thousands of soldiers inundated Southampton. With all these soldiers and their equipment stowed just about everywhere, and with the naval ratings from the Landing Craft, the place was bulging at the seams and it seemed it was time to thin things out. By now we had been transferred to sail refuelling barges to supply

small vessels involved in the coming invasion, petrol not the best cargo for a battle zone!

We received orders to pack up ready to leave our snug billet in the Old Music Hall, eventually to go down to the pier and re-join our barges. We hove down Southampton Water to the oil refinery, where we topped up our tanks to full capacity and returned to our buoys. The port complex was now full of energetic activity. The next morning was bright and sunny as our flotilla slipped their buoys and, waddling in some sort of formation, made out east to enter Chichester harbour, finally bearing off to the eight, to secure a buoy off Itchenor. This was after a tricky passage as the channel was quite narrow and apt to dry out quickly on the ebb. Here the problem of feeding the crews was made easier as we were to be brought ashore, with the novelty of going under canvas, under Army control. This was in a field opposite Itchenor.

June 4th. Next morning was to be the big day. All the crews were reunited with their barges, nothing was being left to chance and that evening, being all shipshape, and we cast off from our buoy and crept out of Chichester harbour, bound for Normandy. D-Day had arrived!

It was a darkish night as we came out of the harbour into the Channel, with the wind now beginning to rise. In consequence, the further out to sea we sailed, the worse the weather became. This old barge wasn't built for this kind of seaway and began to yaw about, making all sorts of motions, as we struggled up one crest to slide in all manner of angles down the other. Taking in water from all sides, it was soon all hands to the pump, a puny wooden handled thing, which was tipping out about a pint of seawater with every stroke.

By now the flotilla was getting a little dispersed and we were losing contact with each other and things were becoming a little desperate. Knowing that the other barges were in the same state was of small comfort. If things were going to carry on in this manner, there would be no flotilla left by the time the main landing was to take place. We had a few hours start on the full invasion armada as we were so slow through the water, and now we were looking to capsize.

We were all sodden and wet through still pumping away, hoping the engines would keep on turning. By this time everything had to be shouted and we were wallowing in the seaway like drunken elephants, now well past St Catherine’s Light on the Isle of Wight. We plugged on manfully, full

of shouted banter to keep our spirits up when suddenly, out of the gloom, appeared a picket boat. Coming as near to us as he could, we were ordered to return to harbour as the operation had been cancelled. This was a great relief, but not of any great surprise with this sort of weather.

So far, since we had left harbour, we had headed by and large into the wind, but now we had to go about for the return leg. This was going to be a bit dicey, the more so since being flat bottomed. What nearest safe haven we would make for would have to wait until this dodgy change of course had been completed. With the waves being blown right across the barge it was up to Curly, our Cox'n to get it right., We hung on tight with baited breath and willed Curly to do just that. After some trials and tribulations, he did and had us heading towards Langstone Harbour, which is a stretch of water that divides Portsmouth from Hayling.

This is not the easiest harbour to enter at the best of times. In fact it is advised not to attempt this at all if any sort of sea is running as there is a large sandbank outside the entrance that has a cheeky name - The Winner! We were to attempt it that night with no visual aids. Of course, needs must when the devil drives, so this advice was ignored, as we would certainly sink if we stayed out much longer.

Our entry to the harbour needed luck and skill, as the entrance was narrow and had the sandbars. With nothing to lose the crew took up positions to look for any markers and to listen for any breaking waves. After many alarms we managed to negotiate the narrows into Langstone Channel where, with help from other boats in the harbour, we eventually moored to buoy in the trot, I believe in Sinah Lake. As soon as we had secured, we all crashed out in our wet gear, completely knackered!

Come morning, it was up betimes to have a count of the flotilla, to find that two of the barges had made it back to Langstone and a third had made a mess of it trying to enter the harbour. It was time to give our barge a check over to see what damage we might have sustained during our adventure overnight. Happily nothing seemed amiss apart from the chaos of the ropes and tackle which is invariably the case after a rough passage. The bilges were overflowing with the seas we had shipped, and setting to with a will we soon had this pumped back over the side and, wonder of wonders, someone somewhere managed to ferry us a hot meal. So, all things shipshape and Bristol fashion, we ended our first D-Day attempt.

We heard sometime during the afternoon that D-Day had been postponed for 24 hours and we would try again this coming night. There was not much we could do but patiently wait for the off again.
Come the evening the wind had abated somewhat, so in the twilight glow we slipped out of Langstone Harbour in an orderly fashion bound again for the coast of Normandy.

My D-Day experiences are fully described in my book.

When we were no longer needed in Normandy, the barges were so battered about by the weather that they were not up to the voyage back. An LCT, a Landing Craft Tank, was used to tow us back. This was quite uneventful, the LST slipping us close to the Nab Tower, where we made our own way back into Langstone to moor near the place we had been some weeks before. Securing the barge and making her all shipshape, we gathered up our belongings, and then it was the trot boat and this took us to the harbour entrance, on the Hayling side. A lorry to waiting to transport us to another *Northney*. This time is was number II.

This turned out to be an infant school come hospital. The COs and the Regulating offices were situated in the large hotel that was on the sea front, actually on the beach. Always on the move like tramps, it didn't take long to settle down in the children's dormitories, on the usual two-high metal beds.

Although it was great to be ashore again after weeks of living in the surging barge, there were one or two drawbacks, more comical than serious. The comic side was watching a six-footer trying to squat on a toilet bowl no more than 12 inches high. This was an act of dedication. The washbowls were around our knees and most awkward. Naturally there were no showers but free-standing bath tubs in the centre of the bathroom, which only the smallest of us could get in, and then with our knees tucked under our chins. Still, the place was light and airy and it made for a good giggle with few complaints.

At HMS *Northney* II we met up again with other flotilla members, and all had tales to tell. Some had lost their barges during the landings, but on the whole everyone seemed in good spirits. Next day found us down at the Hotel outside the Regulating Office where we were all sorted out, doing a rough joining routine before being sent on leave. Returning from leave there was not a lot of work we could do. Daily we went down and mucked about in our barges, sharing out the remaining food we had scrounged on

the other side, which we eventually took home to our families who were experiencing much harsher conditions than ever we were.

Going up and down each day to the barge was really a waste of time, the invading armies were so advanced it was obvious that we wouldn't be put back into service. Finally, we found that we were not required to man the barges daily, so that left us with lots of spare time after cleaning up and doing odd jobs around the school and the hotel areas.

One of the ways of whiling away the time was to go beachcombing each morning with my oppo. As no civilians were allowed in the area, we had the entire beach from Langstone Harbour up to Black Point at Chichester entrance to ourselves. Each morning after breakfast and being mustered, my oppo and I would drop down the shingle bank behind the NAAFI (Navy Army Air Force Institute) canteen, alongside the hotel, and start our walk. Walking the beach was quite something, having never been able to do anything quite like this before, and many an item we found on our walks. One forenoon, we came across lots of large tins upon the beach and many more bobbing up and down just offshore. The tins had a familiar look with no labels - on opening one of the large tins we were not surprised to find that they contained ships biscuits. Someone must have been fed up with hard tack and jettisoned them. Well - there's always another tide.

Another morning, we waded into the sea and dragged a seemingly new dinghy ashore. What to do with it was a puzzle – it wouldn't stow in a kitbag! In the end we offered it to the driver of the NAAFI canteen lorry who, with our help, soon had it loaded and driven away.

Gale periods were the most exhilarating and our expectations greatest, no more so than when, standing at the water's edge in the flying spray, we identified two sea mines adrift just offshore. On returning to the hotel, we reported them to the Regulating Office and in due course a team from HMS *Vernon*, the mine and torpedo school in Portsmouth, came and disposed of them. About the same time someone got us fishing, which was something that I had done previously. The plan given to my oppo and me, was to wait until the tide was at slack water, then at the water's edge, drive two stout stakes into the sea bottom, around 20 feet apart, and stretch a stout line between. Onto this we tied short lines with baited hooks. These would dangle down close to the seabed. We were then to wait patiently for the tide to make and ebb again and then collect the fish

at low water! This was the simplest way to catch fish we were told. We must have done something wrong, as it never seemed to work for us. All in all though, I enjoyed every minute my oppo and I had attempting to catch fish.

The NAAFI canteen was situated on the beach not too far from the hotel, and was a very convenient spot to start beachcombing. Walking the beach eastwards as far as the Chichester Harbour entrance and Black Point was, by now, a trip into nostalgia 1941 seemed an age ago, it now being late summer 1944. I remembered the times I had felt so cold and desolate when training in the ALCs, which had by now borne so much fruit, in as much as our armies were back on the Continent and now were well in to Holland. At Black Point, I thought that in time a great marker of some sort should be set up to commemorate all the men from the *Northneys* and other Hayling bases who trained there to such effect.

The westward walk towards Portsmouth was not a built up beach. Here it was all windswept sand dunes, part of which had been made into golf links, but quite deserted during the war. All along the coasts were strategically set concrete strong points and pill boxes, remaining from the days of the threatened invasion of 1940.

One particular morning, while walking westwards after an overnight storm, my oppo and I, for some unknown reason, decided to have a shufti inside one pillbox situated on the edge of the golf links. I still don't know why we did, as they were common enough structures throughout the UK, and this one we had passed umpteen times in our mooching along the beach. This pill-box was on the fourth hole of the golf course, if memory serves.

Entering through the dark entrance, we were surprised to find ten or a dozen men huddled up together, cold, wet and shivering. Who they were and what they were doing in such an isolated area was quite un-nerving at first sight. On enquiry we discovered that they were seamen from an American vessel that had foundered in the overnight storm, Obviously they needed help swiftly and while my oppo stayed to comfort them, I rushed back down the beach to our Regulating Office to report what we had discovered They immediately set the wheels in motion and, in a very short while, ambulances arrived to whisk them away to hospital. When all the ensuing activity had died away, I looked out seawards and saw a large tug type vessel stranded on the dreaded sand-bar at Langstone Harbour

entrance, the self-same one we had trouble negotiating on our false alarm D-Day. We were much shallower in draught compared to the American vessel, which now lay helpless on the bank and with angry waves washing over her.

The following day, with the sea in a more tolerant mood, one of our barges was sailed around to her at high water and tied up alongside. A working party, which included me, under the command of Skipper Osborne of pre-war Girl Pat fame, proceeded to unload her stores etc. into the barge and take them ashore for naval care. Now that most of the portable weight had been taken from her, she could be floated off at the next high water and under tow was taken to Portsmouth Dockyard.

Later in the course of events, the skipper of the American vessel came to the hotel to thank my oppo and me for the help we gave and came armed with a gift of 200 Camel cigarettes each. This was a princely offering as at the time as we were rationed to 35 cigarettes a week if you could afford them.

At this time at HMS *Northney* II, we odds and sods who had returned from the invasion area, now without boats, were being drafted to other ships and boats and mostly making their way to the Far East where the other war was ongoing. My turn came and, with bag and hammock and a goodbye to my oppo I was off to Port Sunlight, Birkenhead, to join LST382 and sail away to Burma and beyond.

The Landing Ships and Craft Association still have annual reunions – twice to my knowledge on Hayling and if memory serves me right, at the old *Northney* III. Some of these events I have attended.

The End

Description board at the Hayling Island theatre

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